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RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 3562  
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/30/2017

TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM KDEM TH

SUBJECT: THAIS SET DECEMBER 23 ELECTION DATE AMID EU  
OBSERVER SPAT

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission James F. Entwistle, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) On August 27 Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont officially announced a December 23 date for Thailand's general elections, pending the King's endorsement of a formal election decree. The government had repeatedly targeted December 23 as the most suitable date, although election officials had reportedly considered January 6 and 13 as alternatives. Barring unexpected developments, however, it seems clear that elections will be held by the end of the year.

¶2. (C) Surayud noted that the election decree would not be submitted for royal approval until October, when the National Legislative Assembly (NLA) is expected to complete its review of three new organic election laws. One Election Commissioner and a prominent legislator publicly complained that the December date comes too soon, as they feared the Election Commission (ECT) and political parties would have insufficient time to properly prepare. However, some political party leaders told us on August 30 that the King supports early elections, and they are confident the December 23 date will remain unchanged.

¶3. (SBU) ECT officials publicly announced on August 28 they welcomed European Union election observers for the December 23 poll, despite a public spat when the RTG refused to sign a memorandum of understanding with the EU over a planned 150-person election observer mission, a proposal that many in the RTG felt went considerably beyond "observing" to providing technical assistance which was not needed and which would restrict the government's freedom to oversee its own elections. Public comments on August 28 and 29 denouncing the MOU have had nationalistic overtones, with the Prime Minister claiming the document infringed on Thai sovereignty and the NLA Chairman accusing the EU of "interfering in Thai internal affairs." Other press reports quoted officials comparing the proposed MOU with documents the EU normally signed with "failed states."

¶4. (C) In several conversations with Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials, we have heard the same complaints over the proposed MOU, as well as concerns that these "observers" planned to interject themselves into the election

administration itself. We have been assured by our RTG contacts, however, that observers of all kinds are welcome. In addition, we note that the ECT and other Thai organizations are working productively with IFES, NDI, and IRI on US-sponsored democracy assistance related to the elections.

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